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DER: Nease dumped waste at Carlin mines

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Times County Editor

More than 800,000 gallons of industrial waste water and sludge were trucked from the former Nease Chemical plant in College Township and dumped somewhere on R.S. Carlin coal mines in the Mountain-top area during the fall and winter of 1970-71, according to state records.

The waste — about 200 tanker truckloads — came from the concrete lagoon where Nease routinely stored

industrial wastes generated by the company's Dale Summit plant, according to files in the state Department of Environmental Resources' Williamsport regional office.

Harold Klotz of State College, retired Nease vice president for engineering, characterized the waste water and sludge hauled to the Mountain-top as "principally calcium sulfate" derived from neutralizing the chemical plant's acid wastes with hydrated lime.

But Klotz also conceded Thursday that sediment from that same concrete lagoon, after stabilization with

Chemfix and removal to earthen ponds, later was determined to be contaminated with organic chemicals and was excavated and removed on orders from the DER.

The DER, in November 1977, charged Ruelgers-Nease (formerly Nease Chemical Co.) with polluting Spring Creek through the discharge of industrial wastes, including the carcinogenic pesticides Kepone and Mirex.

In testing at the plant site in 1981, the DER identified the Chemfix lagoons as the source of

"greatest contamination by organic chemicals." While Klotz said he did not know what else the lagoon waste water and sludge contained, he said he didn't think it contained Kepone.

"I don't think it was ever proved — at least to my satisfaction — that there was Kepone in the Chemfix lagoons," said Klotz. Klotz worked for Nease Chemical and later Ruelgers-Nease from 1969 until his retirement last year. "There were lots of allegations and never any specific proof about many of these things," he said.

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Steve Foard, manager of environmental services for Ruetgers-Nease, said Thursday he has begun going through old company records and files to determine what might have been hauled to Carlin's property for disposal under the plant's previous ownership.

Nease Chemical Co. became a wholly owned subsidiary of Ruetgerswerke AG of Frankfurt, West Germany, and changed its name to Ruetgers-Nease in 1977.

Other reports of dumping

The information about lagoon wastes being hauled to Carlin property in 1971 comes at a time when the DER is preparing to investigate reports of chemical dumping during the 1960s at five Carlin-operated strip mine sites in Snow Shoe and Burnside townships and one site in Clearfield County.

Dan Spadoni, the DER's regional community relations coordinator, said site inspections should occur this month.

At township meetings last month, several former Carlin truckers told supervisors they frequently hauled industrial waste both from Nease Chemical and from the former American Aniline Co. of Lock Haven, and dumped it in a half-dozen different Carlin strip mines in the neighboring Mountaintop-area municipalities.

During a meeting with DER officials last week, former Carlin employees also reported that a Nease tank with unknown contents was buried in a lime-lined pit on Carlin property in about 1974.

Klotz, who wrote most of the letters Nease Chemical sent to state health and environmental resources officials during the 1970s, said Thursday that he believes R.S. Carlin had a proper permit that allowed the industrial waste disposal.

"I don't know that I ever saw a copy of the permit, but we knew he had a permit," Klotz said.

Carlin's attorney, John Miller Jr. of Bellefonte, said his client unquestionably had a state-issued permit to cover the industrial waste disposals that might have occurred on his property. But, Miller added, the permit has so far not been found.

Klotz said he could not recall exactly when — or why — Nease stopped using the Carlin disposal site; but he estimated that the chemical firm stopped shipping industrial waste to the Mountaintop sometime in the early to mid-1970s.

State officials knew

Officials in the state Department of Health, as well as in DER's Environmental Pollution Strike Force, knew that liquid from the lagoon was being hauled to Carlin property for disposal, according to documents on file in Williamsport.

In fact, the current head of the DER's regional solid waste office, Richard Bittle, was assigned in late 1970 to follow a tank truck leaving Nease. Bittle, a new water quality bureau employee at the time, reported that the truck drove to a Carlin-operated strip mine and dumped its load. Bittle also reported seeing a permit posted at the site.

Bittle said recently that he filed his report and was unaware of any further action.

On Jan. 18, 1971, Klotz supplied the regional office with Carlin's disposal site permit number: WD-572-R6.

State officials made at least one attempt after receiving Klotz's letter to determine the nature and scope of Carlin's waste disposal permit, but there is no clear indication of what they found. The files also did not indicate where the property was located.

The DER last week said it has been unable to find a copy of the Carlin permit.

Waste disposal permits issued to strip mine operators during the 1960s are stored on microfiche at the Bureau of Mining and Reclamation in Harrisburg, but the holdings

include more than 200 rolls of microfiche and three of the four indexes to the files have been misplaced, Karl C. Sheaffer, chief of the bureau's permit division, said Friday.

There is no indication in DER records that state officials ever instructed Nease to stop hauling lagoon waste to the Carlin strip mines — even after an accidental discharge from the concrete impoundment on April 28, 1971, (during the period hauling was taking place) resulted in a fish kill in nearby Spring Creek and caused what William Eichbaum, the then-director of DER's Environmental Pollution Strike Force, termed "substantial damage" to stream quality.

Nease lawyers disputed Eichbaum's characterization of the incident, but the company subsequently made a settlement of \$3,500 to the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Fund.

In correspondence between Klotz and Williamsport while the lagoon level was being drawn down, the Nease vice president gave state officials regular progress reports on the hauling operation.

On Jan. 18, 1971, Klotz wrote that icy conditions at the Mountaintop dump site and frozen valves on some of the tankwagons had been interfering with the schedule. After estimating the job was "about one-half completed after the removal of 102 loads," the Nease vice president added: "Carlin is sanding the icy areas at the site and has a gas heater now to unfreeze the tankwagons. With reasonable weather conditions, we have made four trips per day, but I believe overall we can only count on 25 to 30 loads per month thru the winter."

When contacted Thursday, Klotz defended the company's actions, saying Nease acted in good faith to follow state orders to abandon its lagoon storage system.

"DER was aware of everything we were doing," Klotz said Thursday. "They were monitoring things as we went along."